

Good Morning. As we begin this General Session, allow me to express my gratitude to all of you for the opportunity to be the Speaker of the House. I am truly grateful to serve this House and the people of Utah.

One of the benefits of being the Speaker is that I get to brag about what Utah is doing. During my travels this past year, I've been able to share what we've done to achieve some pretty impressive successes. How despite some lean times we've budgeted wisely while crafting creative pension and medicaid reform; funded education, found innovative immigration solutions; and held to our belief in the free market and the power of individuals and families.

For me, the most significant visits took place not in Charleston, Tampa or New Orleans. Not in Puerto Rico or even China. Instead, these experiences took place right here in Utah.

The first was in Ephraim, where I spoke to a room full of exceptional rural High School students. Given the sincerity, urgency and meaningful nature of our interaction, I can only hope they will be among the people who replace you and me in these chambers someday. Logan Wisener, who led us in the pledge of allegiance this morning, was one of those students.

During my visit we discussed their future, what their world would look like, and their place in it. As part of a little experiment, I asked Logan and his fellow students to share with me some of their hopes and dreams and fears. We did it via text message so we could keep their identities anonymous, and quite frankly, because most of them are more comfortable communicating that way.

Afterwards, I wrote down a few of their responses so I could remember them. Their comments made a profound impact on me, and I hope I can convey the spirit in which they were sent.

"My deepest hope," wrote one student, "is that they find a cure for cancer really soon so my family will stop suffering."

Many students mentioned their concerns about the economy, our military conflicts in the Middle East, even our national debt. It's clear they are connected to the world around them. But more encouraging than their grasp of current events, was the realization that they belong to a generation that wants to make a positive difference.

A number of students stated they didn't want to let their parents down.

"To recognize truth," wrote one. "To make a difference in just one person's life," wrote another. "To be the kind of person others can look up to," wrote a third.

In the midst of daily meetings with influential people about complex issues, these students and their simple statements brought some questions into sharp focus for me.

How can we in this body help our youth achieve their hopes and dreams? What should we be focusing on?

We can't cure cancer in this chamber, but we can help make Utah a welcoming place where university research is encouraged and businesses who will find a cure can thrive.

We can't change our demographics. In Utah, we like our families large which makes funding schools a

little more difficult. But we can provide a world class education to those who want to learn and use innovative techniques to deliver that education.

We can't ensure that kids won't let their parents down. But we can make Utah a place where families have every opportunity to be strong and where the rights of parents are protected.

The second profound experience was on Memorial Day. I was invited to speak at Camp Williams where families gathered to pay their respects. Even the most eloquent words would be insufficient to describe how humbling it was to stand before people whose loved one sacrificed all in defense of freedom. We honored the sacrifice and bravery of these soldiers. We honored men from Logan and American Fork, from West Valley and Clinton.

We speak on this floor often about freedom, liberty, God-given rights and the Constitution. And for good reason. These are ideals worth fighting for, and worth dying for. And many Utahns have paid that price. May we remember them when we are considering the issues before us.

Finally, I was invited to visit a few of the private organizations that partner with the State to provide services to the homeless. We in this room live relative lives of comfort, and I don't think any of us truly understand the lives of those teenagers who escape to that run-down building on State Street. These are young men and women who often prostitute themselves to survive, these are lost boys who have nowhere to go.

As I met with the adults who provide the basics of life for these children, I was impressed by their compassion and dedication. I thought of my own children about the same age. My heart ached for these kids and their seemingly insurmountable challenges.

I don't tell this story to demand that we fund a program. Government alone can't and shouldn't solve this problem. But as lawmakers, we can be aware of problems plaguing our society and help make those around us aware of such problems. We can encourage the private sector and our citizens to lend a hand that will be much more effective than government red tape. We can make it easier for all to get involved and help lift up those who have been knocked down.

With massive amounts of information and new cutting edge tools at our disposal, we should be able to craft creative solutions. As a society, we should be able to provide an effective safety net for our most needy without burying them in needless bureaucracy. As a government, we should be able to protect our citizens without trampling on their civil rights. As a legislature, we should be able to meet the needs of the people of Utah without over-burdening them with taxes. As parents, we should be able to figure out how to proactively teach our children without breaking the bank.

In fact, we must be cautious now more than ever with how we spend taxpayer money so that we don't do anything to cause our re-blooming economy to wilt.

Almost daily I have opportunities to meet with amazing Utahns doing remarkable things that make our state a wonderful place to live. We talk about their issues and I am reminded that we are elected to understand the proper role of government and meet the legitimate challenges facing our State.

Those of us who sit in this chamber today have been elected to help overcome those challenges. I can promise that the next 45 days will be both fulfilling and frustrating. Remember that you are responsible first and foremost to your constituents. You are here to serve them. You are in this room to make the

hard choices just like others have before you.

And while we are making those choices, think of the hopes and dreams of those High School students and how we can best help them. Is it debating over who can braid whose hair or figuring out how to stop jails from filling up and students from dropping out? Is it in finagling ways to fund our pet projects or scrutinizing budgets that stretch into the billions of dollars?

During our lively and passionate discussions of founding principles and state sovereignty, let us not forget the many lives willingly given to protect our ability to have those conversations.

Throughout this intense and fast moving process, it is my hope that we look to our future. We must give thought to our communities and our role in providing an appropriate safety net for the most vulnerable among us. We must create an environment of safety and security for future generations.

So take what is in your heart – and in your mind – and apply it to our occasionally flawed but brilliant political system. Come up with real solutions for Utahns that will work without being intrusive. Not everyone will agree with your position every time. You may need to find a way to compromise while holding firm to your principles and values.

Be bold. Be brave. Be able to say when this session is over that you did your very best.

Thank you.